



For Immediate Release, December 30, 2013

Library Commission Key Partner in Development of National Guidebook

CHARLESTON, WV. A national program to create the [State Library Guidebook: Support for Digital Literacy in Public Libraries](#), which will help state library agencies across the nation plan their digital literacy projects, involved key input from the West Virginia Library Commission as a partner. The Guidebook, part of a federal initiative, addresses America's need for better digital literacy to ensure national competitiveness.

In order to gather data for the Guidebook, the nonprofit corporation [WebJunction](#) piloted digital literacy projects with the West Virginia Library Commission and the Illinois and Mississippi state library agencies. WebJunction also examined national program models and survey data to understand trends and resources in digital literacy. Interviews with local public libraries provided case studies of digital literacy services and needs.

The Institute of Museum and Library Services funded the effort through a grant to WebJunction, which provides resources and online training to libraries and the communities that support them.

The American Library Association defines digital literacy as "the ability to find, understand, evaluate, create and communicate digital information." Eight out of 10 teachers say e-learning increases student engagement and work quality; online high school graduates are twice as likely to attend college as those who are not online; almost half of college students take at least one online class (Source: [Guidebook](#)).

For job seekers, eight out of 10 Fortune 500 companies require online job applications; using the Internet to look for a job reduces average unemployed time by 25%; by the end of the decade, 77% of jobs will require tech skills (Source: [Guidebook](#)).

State library agencies like the West Virginia Library Commission support public libraries to benefit local communities and help transform people's lives. The Guidebook is a reference tool for state library agencies to fine-tune their digital literacy initiatives. "It's an idea book," said Karen Goff, Secretary of the West Virginia Library Commission. "State library agencies will use the report to evaluate their own digital literacy efforts and find new ways of addressing the issue."

The Guidebook is comprised of three sections: an overview of the current state of digital literacy in public libraries, a proposed framework for considering specific types of digital literacy supports, and a sample planning process designed for state library agencies.

Each partner state library engaged its stakeholders to obtain perspectives on digital literacy. The West Virginia Library Commission held a focus group meeting with representatives from public libraries and other state agencies. The engagement “provided a great opportunity to explore the perceptions and needs of libraries in the field,” according to the Guidebook. “It was also an opportunity for non-library participants to expand their knowledge about the roles libraries play.”

Secretary Goff was pleased with the meeting: “The focus group was one of the best things to come out of the project. From small libraries we learned that, if someone comes in wanting to learn, staff members are often too busy to help. It’s clear that libraries need assistance in offering training.”

“There are lots of online sources for learning how to use a computer,” Goff observed. “The focus group said that links to those sources help, but because public access computers are so busy, with many systems limited to 30 minute sessions, having trainers come in to hold classes for library staff and patrons is the best option. Some libraries are doing this now but many more need help from volunteers willing to offer classes.”

In each partner state, WebJunction chose three public libraries for a digital literacy case study. The three West Virginia public libraries were Martinsburg-Berkeley County, Mary H. Weir and Raleigh County. Together they highlight different conditions and approaches to addressing community needs.

The Martinsburg-Berkeley County Public Library in Martinsburg believes, according to the [Guidebook](#), that learners have individual needs and often learn at different paces. The library offers a self-paced technology training model that is supported by technology helpers in the computer lab.

The Mary H. Weir Public Library in Weirton leverages the national AmeriCorps program to significantly expand its digital literacy capacity.

The Raleigh County Public Library in Beckley has, in 12 short months, gone from being mainly a book depository to being a dynamic community partner. Through a keen focus on educating patrons coupled with bringing its technology up-to-date, the library is raising the level of digital literacy in its community.

The West Virginia Library Commission will use the Guidebook for its future plans. Secretary Goff explains: “With the Internet, online tools and ebooks the new normal, digital literacy is here to stay. Digital literacy will continue to evolve as a necessary skill set for individuals, organizations and communities to have in order to participate in our ever more connected society. West Virginia’s libraries will be there to offer assistance, resources and guidance.”

The West Virginia Library Commission serves the people of West Virginia and encourages lifelong learning, individual empowerment, civic engagement and an enriched quality of life by enhancing library and information services for all West Virginians. More information is available at www.librarycommission.wv.gov.

-30-

Contact: Preston Richardson, Information Specialist

E-mail: preston.i.richardson@wv.gov

Phone: (304) 558-3978, ext. 2010

Fax: (304) 558-1612

www.librarycommission.wv.gov